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SUCCESS STORY

AVIPA Pumps Hope into Marja

USAID program uses agriculture and community-government cooperation to stabilize conflict-ridden areas.



Photo: IRD/AVIPA Plus

The district governor of Marja calls on elders to participate in AVIPA's voucher distribution program, which will deliver 4,000 mobile water pumps to the district.

"Providing employment, seed, and fertilizer is the right way to start," commented one of the participating elders after a shura with the district governor about USAID's AVIPA Plus program.

Only a month after the end of Operation Moshtarak, newly appointed Marja District Governor Hajji Zaher has already held the first in a series of meetings with local elders on USAID's Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Production in Agriculture (AVIPA) Plus program, explaining the benefits and responsibilities that come with it.

The first meeting set a precedent for future cooperation by encouraging community participation and government guidance – the base on which AVIPA's interventions in agriculture rest. The program promotes cooperation between farmers and government representatives, using agriculture to stabilize conflict-ridden areas of Afghanistan.

Built by USAID in the 1950s, Marja's farmland is divided by canals into areas called blocks. Each block – an area the size of a traditional sub-district – has a local council, or *shura*, and a community leader.

At the first meeting, the district governor gave these elders the good news that USAID will soon deliver 4,000 mobile water pumps through the AVIPA Plus program. The elders were asked to meet with their communities and to sign up participants.

"We are happy with the government. We need these pumps to increase irrigation capacity. The district governor is asking us to take responsibility for this process," said one of the elders as he sat in the shura tent outside the Marja District Center after the meeting.

The 4,000 mobile water pumps will help farmers irrigate their fields using water from existing canals. The first distribution is set to begin towards the end of April once all registration lists have been vetted by the district governor and the elders' shura.

The governor also approved a number of AVIPA's cash-for-work canal cleaning projects. These will employ up to 4,000 laborers over the next several weeks. "The security situation is still difficult, but if we start with 100 laborers in a few blocks, other people will see this and they'll want to participate. More and more will join each day," said the governor.

"In Marja, we have canals. We need to get them opened and water flowing. The pumps will ensure we are able to flood our fields more efficiently. Providing employment, seed, and fertilizer is the right way to start," a shura member said. Farmers are also being encouraged to form cooperatives through the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock to receive grants of farm implements through AVIPA Plus.

"The fact that we are willing to come to the district center to listen to the governor," an elder said, "shows we already feel things are getting better."